

Dealing with High Gas Prices

consumer**brief**

Gasoline prices in New Jersey have fluctuated greatly over the last year, making it difficult for consumers to budget for transportation costs. The situation is even more volatile now as the country deals with the effects of Hurricane Katrina.

While we cannot regulate market conditions, government officials can and are closely monitoring gas station pumps and business practices to ensure that consumers get exactly what they pay for.

New Jersey's Office of Weights and Measures inspectors protect honesty in the marketplace by using highly accurate equipment to inspect all types of scales, meters and scanning equipment. All gas station pumps must be registered with the state. Weights and Measures officials and Consumer Protection investigators are conducting inspections at gas stations to ensure that pumps are dispensing accurate amounts of fuel, that pumps and hoses are not damaged, and that advertised prices accurately reflect the price being charged.

What's a consumer to do? Listed below is information on how to use less gasoline, how to avoid being scammed, and how to get the greatest mileage out of a gallon of gas.

SAVING GAS AS YOU DRIVE

In these days of high prices, consumers want to ensure that they are getting the highest possible gasoline mileage. Tips to increase mileage include:

- Don't idle. Engines "warm up" faster when driving. It's more fuel efficient to turn off the engine than to idle for any longer than 30 seconds.
- Don't drive aggressively. Hard acceleration and braking waste fuel, which lowers mileage by 5% in cities and by an incredible 33% on highways.
- Drive no faster than the speed limit. Each 5 mph over 60 costs you an additional ten cents a gallon.

- Unload before you leave. At highway speeds, half of the engine power goes to overcoming aerodynamic "drag." Driving with loaded roof racks and even empty ski racks wastes gas.
- Turn off the air conditioner when you can. It robs power from the engine and uses additional fuel. If the weather permits, use the flow through ventilation system instead of rolling down your car windows.
- Buy regular. If your car specifies regular fuel, don't buy premium under the mistaken belief that your engine will benefit. If your car's manufacturer specifies premium, you may wish to contact the manufacturer to ask if it's all right to use regular instead. Most cars run fine on regular, which generally is at least 10% less expensive than higher grades of gas.

IMPROVING VEHICLE EFFICIENCY

- Watch your tires. Under inflated tires require more energy to move the car, which wastes fuel. Check the tire pressure at least once a month, when tires are cold. Being under inflated by just 2psi can increase fuel use by 1%. Replace worn tires with the same make and model tires as were on your car when it was new.
- Get a tune up. Maintaining your car with regular tune ups can save you up to 6 cents per gallon. A clogged air filter alone can rob fuel efficiency.

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- Buy vehicles with excellent gas mileage, and drive your most fuel efficient vehicle whenever possible. The most efficient vehicles can save up to 50% on the cost of gas.
- Follow the manufacturer's recommendations for preventative maintenance.

TIPS WHEN BUYING GASOLINE

Getting What you Pay for at the Pump

- Consider buying off brand gasoline, which most often is identical to what is sold at franchised gas stations.
- Look for the decal indicating that the gasoline pumps have been tested by the Office of Weights and Measures. Pumps are tested annually.
- Make sure the price advertised on street signs and pump signs is the same as the price showing on the pump itself.
- Make sure attendants have reset the pump to zero before filling your tank.
- Make sure that the pump does not report more gasoline than your car can hold.

PAYING FOR YOUR GASOLINE

Pay attention as you pay for your gas. Check that:

- The total number of gallons you received corresponds with the total price you have been charged.
- The price the attendant says you owe matches the total sale price on the pump.
- The number of gallons, the price per gallon, and the total amount of the sale are printed on any credit receipts you sign, and always check your receipt against your credit card statement.
- If your car starts "pinging" or "bucking" after you have filled your gas tank (especially with premium), the station may be selling gasoline with a lower octane rating than is stated on the pump.

Whenever possible, watch as the attendant swipes your credit card. Unfortunately, it's becoming more and more common for dishonest attendants to swipe your card more than once, which results in extra charges showing up on your monthly credit card statement. Request a receipt to ensure you're being charged the correct amount.

If you experience problems with any of the above issues, try to resolve the difficulty with the gas station manager or owner. If you cannot resolve the matter to your satisfaction, please contact your county or municipal Weights and Measures office or the New Jersey State Office of Weights and Measures.

For more information about the State Office of Weights and Measures, log onto www.njconsumeraffairs.com/owm.htm.

State Office, Avenel, (732) 815-4840

Atlantic County, (609) 345-6700

Bergen County (201) 336-6424

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Cape May County, (609) 463-6475

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